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PITTSBURGH'S COMPREHENSIVE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

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CITY PLANNING DIVISION

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PITTSBURGH'S COMPREHENSIVE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Park H. Martin,¹ M. ASCE

This is the second address I have made before the City Planning Section of the Society on the so-called "Pittsburgh Story." The first delivered at the Annual Spring Meeting held in Louisville, Kentucky, in June 1951, was titled, "The Allegheny Conference—Its Objectives and Accomplishments." This address told about the Allegheny Conference, the Pittsburgh Program, what had then been accomplished, and what was either in process or planned.

Today's paper will recite the accomplishments to date. Many articles have appeared in magazines of national circulation setting forth the "Pittsburgh Story." Mostly written in a dramatic vein, they have often been devoted largely to personalities. This address, while recognizing the value of individuals in planning and carrying out the program is directed more to how the program was developed, what has been accomplished, and how the program has been financed.

Pittsburgh Background

The City of Pittsburgh is not only the center of Allegheny County, but also the hub of the Pittsburgh Industrial Area. (Plate 1.) Within the corporate limits of the City are 54 square miles and 676,000 persons. The County of Allegheny contains 745 square miles and a population of 1,515,000 persons, 1950 census, including Pittsburgh.

Within the limits of the County are 129 separate municipal subdivisions. There is a County Planning Commission which operates in a very limited field; an effective Pittsburgh City Planning Commission which operates inside the City limits, with some other municipalities having local planning commissions. The State Department of Highways and the County of Allegheny are responsible for the major highway routes and most secondary highways.

The Pittsburgh Industrial Area has long been known as one of heavy industry. Because of this, and having been founded in part on the great bituminous coal fields in the region, Pittsburgh over the years had acquired a rather unsavory reputation for smoke and dirt. Its traffic problems were mounting, the parking problem had not been tackled, a new airport was badly needed, assessed valuations in the City declined from a high of \$1,211,867,000 in 1936 to a low of \$961,000,000 in 1947, with the Golden Triangle showing a higher rate of decline, all of which had become a matter of grave concern to its business and political leaders.

Toward the end of World War II they decided it was high time that somebody did something about the situation.

The Allegheny Conference on Community Development

As a first step it was agreed to form a citizens' organization to be concerned with the future of the region. Known as the Allegheny Conference on

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Community Development and now commonly called "The Allegheny Conference," its purpose was also to stimulate and coordinate research and planning, looking to a unified community plan for the region as a whole. The Conference by educational means was to secure public support of projects that were approved by the Conference as parts of that over-all unified plan, and to see that something is done to bring about the fulfillment of the plans. Where qualified agencies existed the Conference turned to them for research and planning assistance. In certain fields, where no such qualified agency existed, the Conference created its own staff to do the research and planning. Committees composed of qualified persons were formed to study various phases of the community's needs and to make recommendations in relation thereto.

It will be seen as we progress through this paper that a great deal of emphasis has been placed upon the "Golden Triangle." It is the business and commercial heart of the City and County, and its assessed valuation represents about one quarter of the assessed valuation of the entire city.

The need of preserving and protecting the stability of the Triangle was recognized and accepted, so that if the program appears to place great emphasis on this area, it is deliberate. While the County is growing in the suburban areas, both residentially and commercially, it is believed that the central core must be preserved.

The emphasis on preserving the values in the Triangle is further recognized in the highway program and mass transit studies.

A Comprehensive Program

It is our feeling in the Conference that a community improvement program must be broad and balanced. With that in mind, we have been concerned with smoke and flood controls, highways, parking, airports, mass transit, sanitation and public health, recreation and conservation, zoning and urban redevelopment, libraries and other cultural matters, and economic development.

The order in which these subjects are herein treated does not necessarily reflect their degree of importance, except in the case of smoke and flood control. It is believed that without these two projects being accomplished, the entire program might have failed.

Smoke Abatement

Since the turn of the century, Pittsburgh has been concerned about smoke control. As far back as 1911 the State Legislature had passed enabling legislation permitting the City of Pittsburgh to control smoke from all sources, but powerful opposition and civic lethargy blocked all efforts to pass a city ordinance. However, in 1941 the City Council did pass an effective smoke control ordinance. Due to World War II the effective date of the ordinance was not set. In 1946 with Conference urging and support, City Council fixed the effective date as October 1, 1946, requiring industries and railroads to burn solid fuels smokelessly or use other types of fuels. On October 1 the following year, households within the city limits came under the provisions of the ordinance.

Eight years with the ordinance being in full effect have produced amazing results in this heart of the bituminous coal industry. Official figures of the U.S. Weather Bureau show that today Pittsburgh is receiving 89 percent more sunshine than prior to smoke control. Soot and dustfall records reflect an average reduction of 20 percent for the period of 1938-1953, years of high industrial activity. In eight years—1946-1953—the hours of heavy smoke as

compiled by the U.S. Weather Bureau have been reduced by 94.4 percent.

As a result of smoke control, building owners and managers in the Triangle alone have spent more than \$1,500,000 on exterior building cleaning, and other office building cleaning projects are planned.

The benefits of more sunshine and cleaner living have now been extended to all of Allegheny County. In 1949 the Board of County Commissioners enacted a County-wide ordinance which embodies the principal features of the Pittsburgh ordinance. To date industry in Allegheny County has spent more than \$200,000,000 in advancing smoke control. The installation of modern combustion equipment, dust collectors, new boiler plants, precipitators, and other modern devices are contributing immensely to the elimination, reduction, and control of smoke and other industrial pollutants.

Dieselization on the railroads has practically solved the problem of railroad smoke. Now railroad operations throughout Allegheny County are 81 percent dieselized; yard operations 91 percent. Even the colorful, smoking, stern wheel river boats have largely been discarded for diesel power, and now these operations are 78 percent dieselized.

The result of the smoke control program in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County is all the more remarkable because of the fact that this center of heavy industry consumes about 50,000,000 tons of coal annually.

Flood Control

In 1936 a disastrous flood hit Pittsburgh and the Upper Ohio Valley. Flood crests from the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers converged at the Point, flooding the lower part of the Triangle with a depth of about ten feet. Property damage in the Pittsburgh district reached \$94,000,000, and in the Upper Ohio Valley approximately \$200,000,000.

Since 1936 the Federal Government through the U.S. Corps of Engineers has constructed a \$100,000,000 flood control system in this region. Eight major dams have been erected in the watersheds of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers, and all are now in operation. If the dams had been in operation at the time of the 1936 flood, the U.S. Engineers estimate the flood level at the Point would have been reduced ten and one-half feet.

Stream Pollution Abatement

Sixty municipalities in Allegheny County have entered into agreement with the Allegheny County Sanitary Authority to design and construct a system of collector sewers and a disposal plant. At the present time substantially all of the sanitary wastes of these communities are disposed of, untreated, in the rivers. Industrial wastes will also be treated.

The design plans have been completed and approved by the Commonwealth. Construction work will begin during 1955.

Triangle Redevelopment

The Allegheny River flowing down from the northeast joins with the Monongahela River flowing in from the southeast to form the Ohio River, near the geographic center of Pittsburgh. The area lying between these two rivers and extending about one mile east from their juncture is known as the Golden Triangle. (Plate 2.) Comprising an area of approximately 330 acres of which 70 acres are given over to streets, the Triangle is the heart of the business and commercial life of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County as well as the hub of the highways and transportation systems serving them. It is also the regional

and metropolitan center of a Tri-State area of more than 4,000,000 people and is one of the most compact central business districts in the country.

Point Park and Gateway Center Development

The area at the juncture of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers is known as "The Point." (Plate 4.) This was the site of Fort Duquesne and Fort Pitt, and it was here that the city was originally founded. To preserve the site of the two forts, the State is constructing an historical park comprising 36 acres. Started in 1945 this project is being financed entirely by the Commonwealth and to date it has spent more than \$7,500,000 in land acquisition alone. All the existing buildings that stood in the area have been razed, and grading and landscaping is partly completed. A river wall around the park has been built together with riverbank slope paving.

In the park area an elaborate traffic interchange will be built which will connect Fort Pitt Boulevard along the Monongahela, and Fort Duquesne Boulevard along the Allegheny, with the street system in the Lower Triangle. Two double-deck bridges across the rivers will also be constructed by the State. Construction has been started on the bridge across the Monongahela River.

Early in this project the State requested the Allegheny Conference to represent it in the development of plans for the Park and to coordinate local interest. This responsibility was accepted by the Conference.

In addition to initiating studies on the Park project, the Conference also studied the adjacent area as well. This area covering 23 acres was largely run down as a result of floods, railroad yards, and old loft buildings. The Conference evolved a plan for the redevelopment of the entire area. In July 1946 Conference representatives presented the plan to the Equitable Life Assurance Society of the U.S. with the request that the Society become the re-developer.

It was apparent from the beginning of negotiations, that to acquire the land where so many different owners and relatively small parcels of land were involved, the power of eminent domain would be essential if the project were to succeed. At this time the City of Pittsburgh did not have an Urban Redevelopment Authority. The Conference recommended to City Council that such an agency of government with the power of eminent domain be created, and on November 18, 1946, the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh was established by action of the Mayor and City Council.

An essential step in the urban redevelopment process is the certification of an area as subject to redevelopment by the City Planning Commission. After thorough studies the City Planning Commission certified the entire area of both the proposed 36-acre park and the 23-acre adjoining property as a redevelopment area. The Urban Redevelopment Authority acted as the land-assembler of the 23-acre tract, and entered into an agreement with Equitable Life Assurance Society to be the redeveloper. Called Gateway Center, the plan provided for complete readjustment of the street pattern and the initial construction of three large office buildings with only about 25 percent land coverage. Off-street loading and parking were required as part of the redevelopment plan.

Leading Pittsburgh corporations signed long-term leases with Equitable Life to occupy space in the new buildings. These agreements were executed in February 1950 by the Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation, Mellon National Bank and Trust Company, National Supply Company, Peoples Natural Gas Company, Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, Union Switch and Signal Company, Westinghouse Air Brake Company, and Westinghouse Electric Corporation.

It is interesting to note that the agreements were negotiated before all the land had been acquired in Gateway Center and before the buildings were completely designed. At the present time two 20-story buildings and one 24-story building have been completed, and are occupied. Equitable's investment in Gateway center to date is approximately \$43,000,000. Occupancy began in the spring of 1952.

Construction of a fourth building in Gateway Center will start this fall. Fifteen stories in height, it is being built by the State to house all State Departments now renting space in numerous buildings in the City. Estimated to cost about six million dollars, it is to be ready for occupancy in the spring of 1956. The Peoples First National Bank and Trust Company announced last September its intention to build a bank and office building in the area.

Gateway Center provides for open space around the buildings, creating—in effect—an extension of Point Park. The City has widened and relocated Liberty Avenue as part of the project, and certain other thorofares in the area will also be widened and relocated; others have been vacated.

The ultimate plan for Gateway Center provides for additional structures, including an open-deck parking garage. The existing Stanwix Garage in the area has already been enlarged by the addition of one story, providing a total capacity of 600 car spaces.

Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation Expansion

Another major project accomplished, using the services of the Urban Redevelopment Authority, has been the expansion of the mills of the Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation on the Southside of Pittsburgh. (Plate 3.) As in the case of Gateway Center, the Urban Redevelopment Authority acted as the land assembling agency after the City Planning Commission had studied and certified the area as being subject to redevelopment under the terms of the Redevelopment Law of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Representing an expenditure of well over \$50,000,000, it is unlikely that this expansion would have taken place inside the City had there been no Redevelopment Authority to acquire the land. The Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation has also signed agreements to be the redeveloper of a blighted area in what is known as the Hazelwood section of the City. (Plate 3.) This area has been certified by the City Planning Commission. The project contemplates the removal of a blighted residential area and the construction of a new mill.

University of Pittsburgh Expansion

Another instance of the effectiveness of the Redevelopment Authority is the expansion of the University's facilities for its Graduate School of Public Health. Here again after certification of the City Planning Commission, the Redevelopment Authority has entered into agreement with the University to act as Redeveloper of the certified area. Demolitions are taking place and construction for the new buildings will follow in the near future.

Parking

During the years 1945-1946 the Allegheny Conference and the Pittsburgh Regional Planning Association carried on an exhaustive study of the parking problem in the Golden Triangle. This study showed the existing situation, with an analysis of future needs and recommendations as to how the needs should be met. As a result the 1947 session of the Pennsylvania Legislature enacted enabling legislation permitting the City to create a Public Parking Authority. The Authority was created by the City the same year. Since that

time the Authority has completed and has in operation two above-ground open-deck garages, providing some 1550 car spaces. It has in construction a six story underground garage under Mellon Square which will provide approximately 900 car spaces. Bids were received at the first of this month for the construction of two more above-ground open-deck garages which will provide a total of 1392 car spaces. Two more open-deck above-ground garages are in the planning stage. They will provide about 1450 additional car spaces, making the ultimate total under Authority ownership of seven garages and 5300 car spaces. All of the rate schedules are designed to have the garages operate as short time facilities, although spaces are rented out on a monthly basis. The all-day parker is at present being provided for in privately operated lots on the fringe areas of the Triangle.

Highway Program

A far-reaching highway building program is underway in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County.

The Penn-Lincoln Parkway—the biggest single highway project ever undertaken in this area—is a controlled access major highway which will carry routes no. 22 and no. 30 into and through the Triangle. Twenty-seven miles in length, 9.5 miles of which are east of the Triangle, the Parkway provides a direct east-west highway through the City and County.

Four and six lanes divided, it has two twin-tube tunnels, one known as the Squirrel Hill Tunnel is now completed, and the other, under what is known as Mt. Washington, soon to be built. Squirrel Hill Tunnel is 4,225 feet in length. The tunnel under Mt. Washington will be a few hundred feet shorter. When finished, the Penn-Lincoln Parkway will have sixteen points for entering and exiting. Seven miles of the eastern section of the Parkway were opened for travel in June 1953, and in October 1953 nine miles of the western part of the Parkway were opened for public use.

The entire Penn-Lincoln Parkway project will cost over \$125,000,000 when completed. While the project is a non-toll highway, it is proposed to build the Mt. Washington Tunnel as a toll project. A Tunnel Authority has been created and is now engaged in the planning and design of this tunnel. Those users of the Parkway who prefer not to pay tolls may use the alternate Saw Mill Run Boulevard By-pass. Completed about a year ago, this is a four-lane divided, limited-access road which passes around Mt. Washington. It is believed that most motorists will prefer to use the tunnels due to savings in time and distance.

Other major four-lane divided highway projects that have either been completed or are in the process of design are—McKnight Road; Sharpsburg-Etna Highway; Ohio River Boulevard, Pittsburgh Extension; and the Crosstown Thorofare. Numerous other lesser highway projects have been constructed. Four new major river bridges have been completed by the State or County in the past several years. Tarentum, Elizabeth, Rankin, and Dravosburg, representing over \$27,000,000 expenditure of public funds.

The western extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike was opened for traffic in December 1951. Passing to the north of Pittsburgh and about fifteen miles from the Triangle, ready access is provided by means of the Penn-Lincoln Parkway East and State Routes no. 8 and no. 19 to the west.

Lower Hill Project

Adjoining the Triangle on the east is a section known as the "Hill District." One of the older parts of the City, a large portion of it has many

characteristics of a slum area with an extremely wasteful street pattern of land use. After careful study the City Planning Commission has certified 105 acres immediately adjoining the Triangle as being subject to redevelopment. The Urban Redevelopment Authority of the City is now in the process of working out an agreement with the Housing and Home Finance Agency of the Federal Government for Federal aid in the redevelopment of the area.

The plan provides for use of about one-half of the area for a combined public auditorium and sports arena, a symphony and grand opera building, and a building for the Pittsburgh Playhouse. The remainder of the area is planned for modern tower apartments. To act as redeveloper for the area being set aside for the Auditorium, a Public Auditorium Authority has been created. The plan for the Auditorium-sports Arena is unique. It provides for a retractable roof when the auditorium is in use during the summer by the Civic Light Opera Association. For light opera purposes, 9,000 seats are provided. During the fall and winter season when the auditorium is being used for sports events, such as basketball, boxing, and ice hockey, as many as 11,000 seats will be provided. Conventions may also be held in the auditorium with provision being made for exhibition space. This project has moved to the point that the City and County Governments each have agreed to contribute \$1,500,000, a local foundation has agreed to contribute \$1,000,000, and \$2,000,000 is to be raised from corporations and the public. The balance of the funds estimated at \$3,000,000 is to be raised by the sale of revenue bonds by the Authority. It is expected that demolitions will start in the area during 1955. Approximately 3,000 families live in this area. Probably 80 percent of them are eligible for public housing. The Public Housing Authority has recently completed 1,550 housing units, making a total of 7,011 permanent public housing units. These will form the major reservoir to house displaced persons eligible for public housing.

Previously in this article reference has been made to the Crosstown Thoroughfare. Planned to connect with the Penn-Lincoln Parkway, it cuts across the base of the Triangle through the 105-acre redevelopment area. With two free-moving lanes in each direction, it also provides for an additional acceleration or deceleration lane on each side with elaborate connections to the auditorium area. Circular in shape and 400 feet in diameter, the auditorium is completely and immediately surrounded with surface parking areas for about 1,700 car spaces. Additional parking spaces near the auditorium will provide at least 300 more spaces. Two blocks removed from the auditorium is Garage No. 1 of the Public Parking Authority with 786 car spaces.

The first stage plans for the Crosstown Thoroughfare are in design so that construction may keep abreast of the Lower Hill Project.

Mass Transportation

We in the Allegheny Conference have not been unmindful of the very important part that mass transportation plays in the movement of people. The Conference carried on two studies of the mass transit problem in the Pittsburgh area. In Allegheny County there are some 51 different operating mass transit companies. Seventeen of these are long-line carriers, seventeen operate outside the city in the county, and seventeen enter the Triangle. As a result of the Conference's studies, it recommended unification of all the carriers into one company excluding the long-line carriers. The Board of County Commissioners, subsequent to the Conference reports, carried on a study through a committee called the Allegheny County Mass Transportation Study Committee. This Committee filed its report in June 1953 and it recommended not only

unification, but also the creation of a Mass Transit Authority to accomplish the unification. Since it is felt desirable that special legislation be passed to authorize the creation of the Authority, a committee appointed by the County Commissioners is now at work drafting the legislation to be submitted to the 1955 session of the State Legislature.

Greater Pittsburgh Airport

The great expansion in the aviation industry had made the old County Municipal Airport obsolete for modern commercial and jet planes. Not only was the field inadequate, but the terminal facilities as well.

In May 1952 the County of Allegheny completed and opened a fine airport terminal building at a new landing field which had been constructed during the early years of World War II about 14 miles west of the City. (Plate 1.) With runways of adequate length for modern aviation, and protected approach zones, the new field and terminal building should adequately serve the district for many years to come. A new four-lane divided access highway from the airfield connects directly with the Penn-Lincoln Parkway West. Over these modern highways the present driving time to the field from the Triangle is twenty-five minutes. When the new tunnels are completed under Mt. Washington this time should be reduced to about twenty minutes.

Recreation

Recreation facilities in the Pittsburgh area have been expanded during recent years. In the City in 1947 the voters approved a bond issue of \$4,000,000 for new swimming pools and playgrounds. There have been constructed in Pittsburgh what are called "parklets." Twelve of these parklets have been built. Initially started and financed by a private citizen, the City has continued the program with City funds. Parklets are small play areas in congested parts of the City. About one-half to one acre in extent, they are fenced, have slides, swings, sandboxes, and shower pools for little tots. Here the mother can take her children where they may play in safety both from automobiles and the rougher play of older children.

Through the combination of private funds and city funds, a fine Children's Zoo has been built, as well as a new Aviary-Conservatory paid for by city funds.

Beyond the City and County limits, yet within reasonable driving distance, the State has built Raccoon Creek Park and Shawnee Park.

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, a privately-financed group interested in conservation and recreation, has also acquired two fine sites. One known as Ferncliff Park at Ohiopyle is south of the City, the other planned to embrace 6,000 acres, is north of the City at historic McConnell's Mill.

Cultural and Educational Facilities

Earlier in this article it was stated that we in the Conference felt that a community improvement program must be broad and balanced.

To this end there has been carried on an expansion of educational and cultural facilities. While the Conference as an organization cannot claim credit for much of this expansion, yet many of the Conference Sponsors are on the Boards of the institutions of higher learning and other cultural agencies.

The University of Pittsburgh has a building program well underway calling for expenditures of over \$19,500,000. The Medical Center is engaged in a large expansion program. Carnegie Institute of Technology, Pennsylvania

College for Women, Mt. Mercy College, and Duquesne University are all either engaged in or have completed large physical expansion programs.

Last fall the Federal Communications Commission granted a construction permit to Pittsburgh's Educational Television Station WQED. With construction funds provided by private grants, this station went on the air last April.

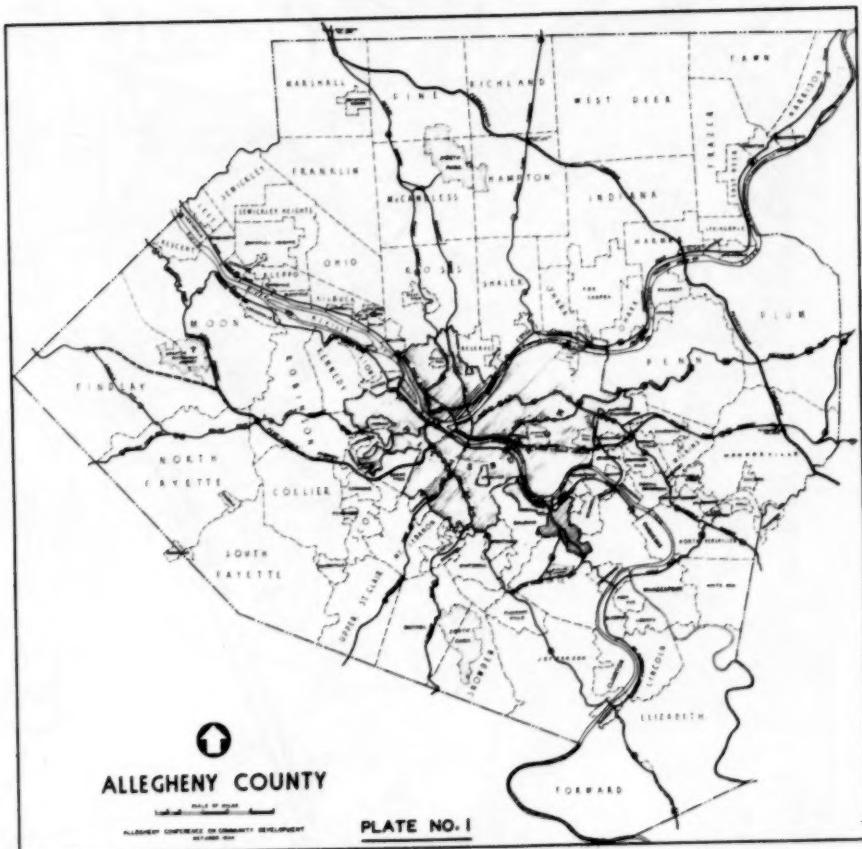
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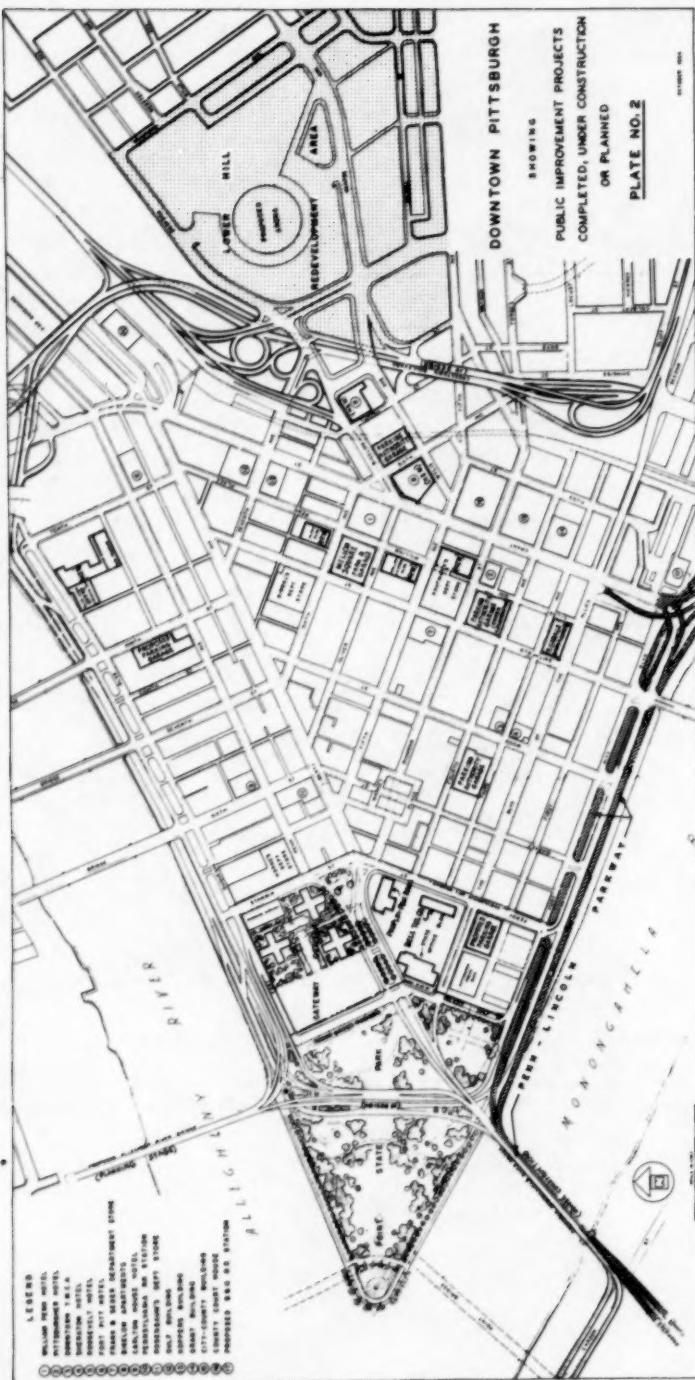
Where has the money come from? The answer to this question is interesting. It has come from several sources—public funds, private funds, and at times a combination of public and private money. State highway projects such as the Penn-Lincoln Parkway have been financed largely from State Highway funds and normal Federal aid. The County of Allegheny did contribute \$5,000,000, and the City of Pittsburgh gave \$1,000,000 toward the cost of the Penn-Lincoln Parkway East. County highway and bridge projects have been financed by the sale of general obligation bonds of the County. Point Park is financed by funds provided by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Gateway Center has been financed by funds from the Equitable Life Assurance Society. Readjustment of street facilities have been financed by the City of Pittsburgh through the sale of general obligation bonds. The Crosstown Thorofare is being financed by a grant of \$2,500,000 by the County of Allegheny and \$2,750,000 of City bond funds. In the section of this article on the Lower Hill Redevelopment, mention has been made of the financing of the Auditorium. The remainder of the project will be financed by private funds. Federal funds to help cover the writedown cost of the buildings to be razed will also be made available. The Parking Authority program has largely been financed by the sale of revenue bonds. No credit or funds of the City of Pittsburgh have been involved except the City did make available parking meter receipts to support the sale of the revenue bonds for the first two garages built by the Authority. Such buildings as Mellon-Steel, Alcoa, Kaufmann's Department Store expansion, and similar private projects, have been financed entirely by private funds. The Jones & Laughlin expansion has been financed by their private funds, and the new Greater Pittsburgh Airport is largely financed by funds provided by Allegheny County with minor assistance from the Civil Aeronautics Authority and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The Flood Control program has been financed by Federal funds. This gives, in general, the pattern of financing the major projects in the program. The Conference itself, is financed by private funds provided by business and industry.

Corollary Benefits

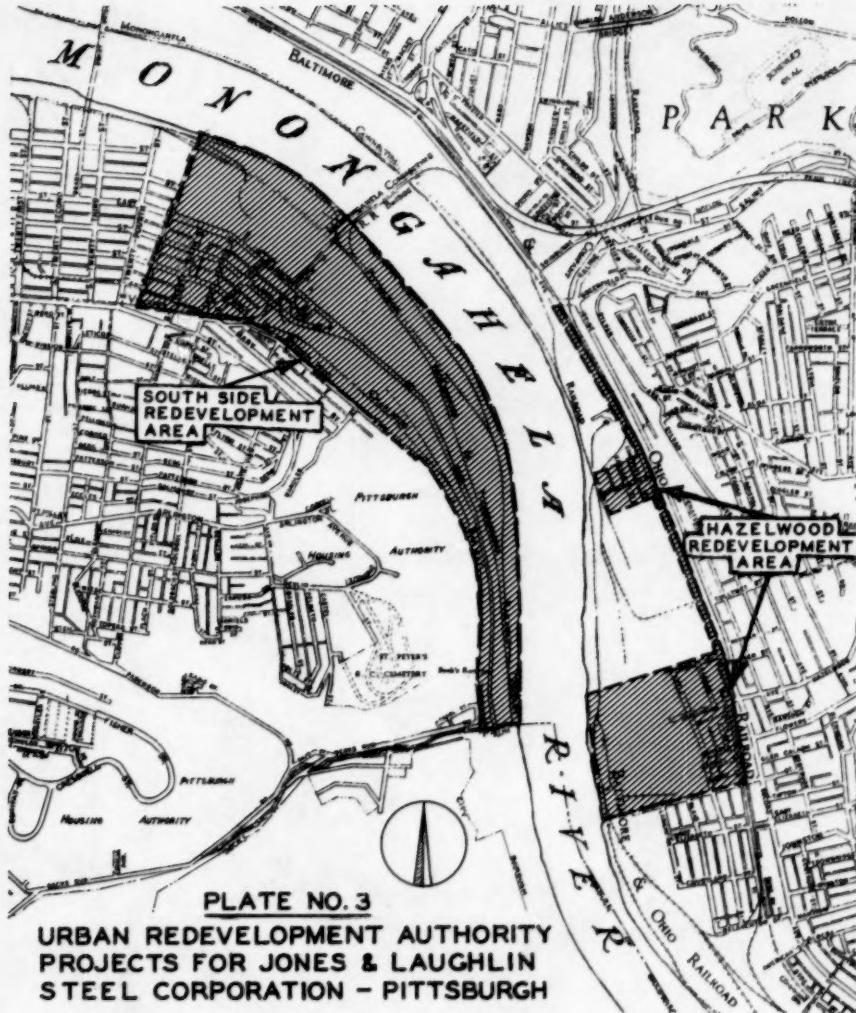
It would be safe to say that none of those initially interested in the Allegheny Conference could foresee the broad benefits to the community that have resulted from the program as planned. Assessed valuations in the City have risen almost \$200,000,000; in the Golden Triangle alone over \$51,000,000. But who then could foresee the \$1,500,000,000.00 invested in plant expansion and new plants that has taken place in the four-county area during the past eight years. Who could foresee the towering 41-story Mellon-Steel Building, the fine new Alcoa Building, the great expansion in the Triangle of Kaufmann's Department Store; that great national corporations would definitely establish their home offices in Pittsburgh; that great company research centers would be established here? Well, it has been done. But greatest of all that has happened has been the change in attitudes. At all levels of society Pittsburghers now believe in their town, and top level business leaders have accepted civic

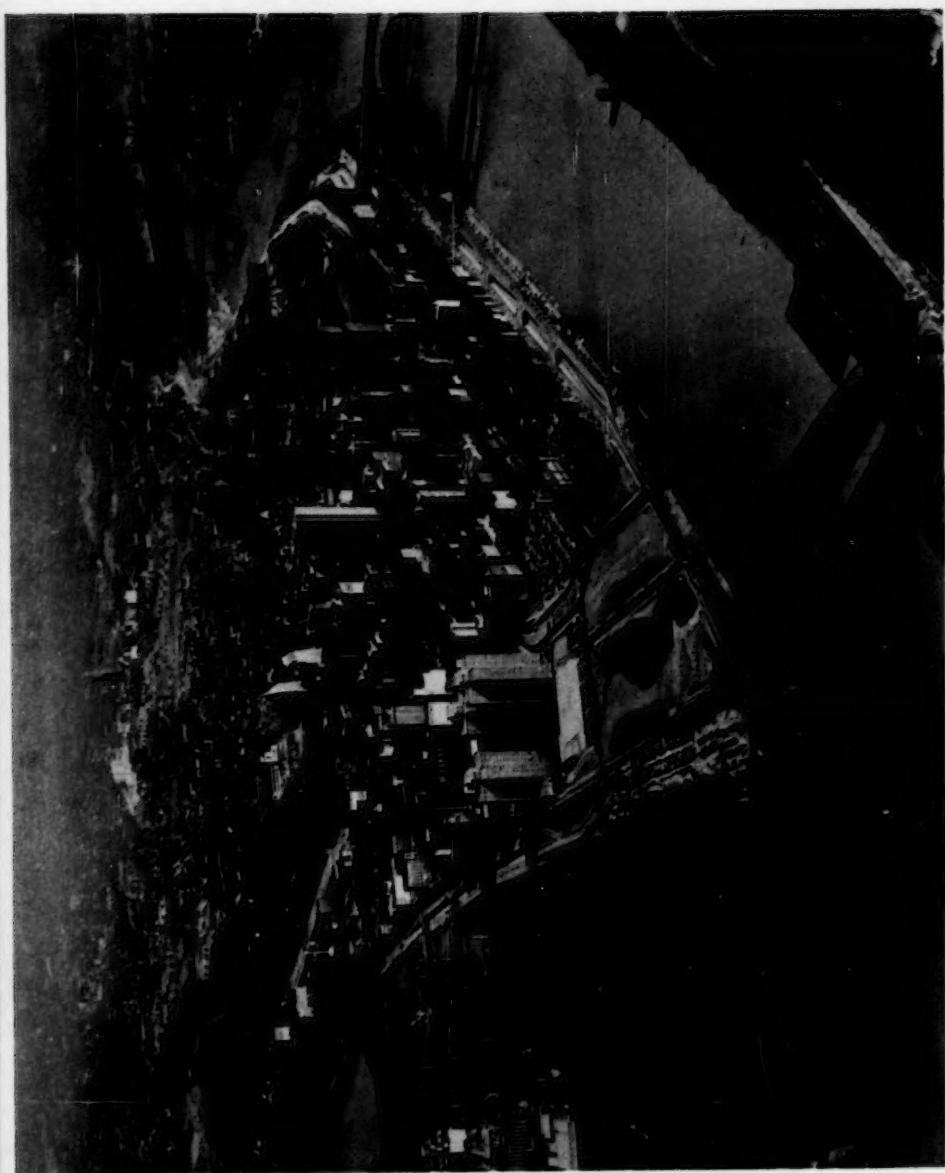
responsibility along with their business responsibility, and planners have seen their plans come into being. While the millennium has not come to Pittsburgh, it has and still is experiencing a great civic renaissance which can well be a source of inspiration to other cities.





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